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THE GOOD BABY

By HELEN MacMURCHY, M.D.

Toronto

O child! O new-born denizen
Of Life's great city. On thy head
The glory of the morn is shed
Like a celestial benison!
Here at the portal thou dost stand,
And with thy little hand
Thou openest the mysterious gate
Into the future undiscovered land.

—LONGFELLOW.

A babe in a house is a well-spring of pleasure.—TUPPER.

PRESIDENT G. STANLEY HALL once said in a lecture delivered in Toronto that the two best people were undoubtedly those two who had the best children. But we cannot expect to find everybody above the average. The richest people are sometimes the poorest parents. We have all seen little sufferers—sufferers by no fault of their own—who should not have been born,—whose parents did not deserve to have a son or a daughter.

However, they *are* born, and we must do our best for them, because “a good constitution,” after all, depends largely on the care, skill, and patience lavished on infancy. With all our boasted progress in pædiatrics, the loss of life under three years of age is appalling still. There die, out of one million children born, in the first year of life, one hundred and fifty thousand; in the second, fifty-three thousand; in the third, twenty-eight thousand. The annual general mortality in England is twenty per one thousand, but the mortality under one year is at the rate of one hundred and thirty-six per one thousand.

In such fearful facts as these Nature has written her first and greatest Law of Health for infancy, namely, that every baby should be nursed by its own mother if possible. A vast majority of the children who die under three years are brought up “by hand.”

There should be a good system in the nursery, faithfully adhered to. There should be a time for everything. The daily bath should always be given at a certain hour, say nine A.M. The baby should be fed at regular intervals, and laid down in its cradle to go to sleep at certain hours every day.

As a rule, no food is required for the first two days, except the small amount of colostrum provided by nature. The baby should be put to the breast some three or four hours after birth unless the mother is too

much exhausted. If the child seems hungry, a teaspoonful of water or a little sugar and water may be given. A teaspoonful of water should be given to infants regularly three times a day. Many babies seem to relish it greatly, and a baby needs water as much as anyone else.

The milk will come in abundance about the third day, and by that time the meconium should have come away and the infant be able to digest its natural food. During the first two days of life the infant should be nursed about four or five times daily, and after the third day every two hours. When it is three months old the interval may be lengthened to two and one-half hours, and when four months old the interval may be three hours. The process of digestion takes nearly two hours when the infant is two months old, and if a second meal is given before the first is digested the process of digestion will not be satisfactorily performed.

Between ten P.M. and six A.M. the baby should be fed twice until it is two months old, then once till it is about six months. After that, if the child is thriving, there is no need to wake it for this purpose. Delicate children must be awakened to nurse, and should also be allowed a longer time to nurse than robust children need. Fifteen or twenty minutes at a time is long enough for the latter, but the former may require twice that time. It must also be remembered that some children take their food more slowly than others.

To feed a baby every time it cries is a great mistake. A baby that is suffering from indigestion will often take food when it is not hungry.

The baby's mouth should always be carefully washed before and after feeding. Small squares of buttercloth, dipped in a warm two and one-half per cent. solution of boric acid may be used for this purpose.

Vomiting in infants is not always serious. It may be caused by slight over-feeding.

One of the best indications of how the baby is thriving is its weight. At birth the average weight is about seven pounds; at three months, fourteen pounds; at nine months, eighteen pounds, and at twelve months, twenty-one pounds. A healthy child will usually double its birth weight at three months and treble it at twelve months.

It is a good plan to substitute one feeding a day, instead of one nursing, at the age of about seven months. This makes a beginning for weaning, which should usually be completed about the age of twelve months. The first food may be milk thickened slightly with good bread, or thin, well-made oatmeal gruel.

When the mother for any reason cannot nurse the child we must adopt the best system of infant feeding discovered so far, namely, by

modified milk. But that is too large and important a subject to be dealt with here. It is, as Kipling says, "another story."

The baby should have its bath at a stated time every day, say at nine A.M. After being gently undressed it should be carefully supported and lowered gradually into the water, feet first, and held there a little time till it gets accustomed to the feeling of the water. The greatest care must be taken to avoid frightening it in any way. Three minutes is long enough for the baby to remain in the water, and the whole process of bathing and dressing should occupy about twenty minutes. An expert can do it in fifteen minutes, but it must never be hurried, and everything must be done with the utmost care and gentleness, so that the baby may enjoy its bath and get all the benefit of it without any harm. For the first few weeks of life the temperature of the water should be 100° F.; a little later, 98° F., and after six months, 95° F. The very best soap should be used and not too much of it, the skin should then be carefully rinsed, and the drying should be done very gently with a soft towel, hardly rubbing the delicate skin at all. If a dusting-powder is found necessary for the axilla, groin, neck, etc., baked corn-starch, powdered, may be used, or equal parts of starch and boric acid.

These precautions will prevent the skin from becoming chafed, but if chafing should unfortunately occur, a bran bath may be used with advantage. This is prepared as follows: Make a bag of cheese-cloth, fill it with one pint of wheat-bran, immerse it in the bath, and squeeze it between the hands for about five minutes. No soap, of course, is used. Chafing of the natal cleft may be prevented by keeping the parts dry and clean, applying sweet-oil or white vaseline on absorbent cotton, and using the dusting-powder. Never use rubber protective diapers. If prickly heat appears, it is probably caused by the irritation of flannel underclothing and excessive perspiration. It may be treated by placing soft muslin or linen next the skin, sponging the body freely with equal parts of vinegar and water, and using the dusting-powder freely.

It is important that the child's clothing should fit comfortably. Too loose clothing gets into folds and bunches and distresses the baby. Tight clothing interferes with respiration and even with digestion. No hard knots, tight bands, buttons, or pins should be used. If they are, the marks of them may often be found impressed on the delicate skin when the baby is undressed. Safety-pins may be used to fasten the diapers. Tapes, or a few stitches, will fasten everything else comfortably. The abdomen should be covered with a broad flannel band, fitting snugly, fastened with stitches. A knitted band may be used instead at about the age of six months if the baby is strong and healthy. All clothing should be supported from the shoulders, and the chest and limbs should be

well protected, but the limbs should not be confined. A soft woollen shirt, with high neck and long sleeves, should be worn.

The baby having been bathed and dressed, it should now be fed and then laid down in its cradle to sleep, say about ten A.M. A new-born child will sleep about nine-tenths of the time, and one six months old about two-thirds of the time. The mattress should be firm but not hard, the pillow very thin, and the covering warm and light. A hot-water bottle is often a great advantage. The room should be quiet and darkened, and the child should be left to sleep till twelve or one P.M. If it wakes sooner, it need not be taken up at once; if it is turned over and put into a comfortable position, it will often go to sleep again.

A baby should be lifted very carefully: the right hand of the nurse or mother should take hold of the clothing below the feet, and the left hand and arm should be placed below the child's head and body; it should then be lifted on the left arm. It is probable that the crying of the new-born in the early weeks of life is nature's provision for exercise and lung-expansion. This cry is loud and strong, and the child becomes red in the face from its exertions. The abnormal cry is longer, not strong, but often a moaning, whining, worrying sound. This abnormal cry means that the baby is uncomfortable, cold, hungry, or in pain, or possibly that it has fallen into the bad habit of crying to be taken up, rocked, dandled, etc. It should be made perfectly comfortable and warm, and fed if it is time. If the cause seems to be pain, it may be undressed, wrapped in a warm blanket, massaged with sweet-oil, or even given a warm bath. It is also a good plan to lay the baby face downward on a hot-water bottle and wrap it up in a warm blanket. Sometimes, especially if the pain is caused by flatulence, half a soda-mint tablet in a tablespoonful of very warm water will give relief.

Another cause of pain in the first day or two of life may be that the meconium has not come away. For this condition, one drachm castor-oil is the usual remedy. This is also an excellent remedy when a somewhat older infant has a number of small, hard movements. If, however, the stools are green or acrid, or the infant suffers from constipation, hydrargyrum cum cretâ is preferred, the dose being one-half grain three times a day. Other remedies for constipation are injecting into the rectum one tablespoonful of sweet-oil or one teacupful of soap and water (tepid). These should not be repeated without a doctor's order. Another simple but effectual plan is to introduce into the rectum a small cone of paper well oiled or vaselined about the diameter of a quill and about one inch long, half an inch being introduced into the rectum. The number of movements for the first week of life is usually three or four per day, and after the first month two, sometimes one.

Affectionate attention and care undoubtedly make an infant happy, even before it begins to "take notice," and much more so afterwards. But a baby is not a toy and should never be made a plaything of. It should never be waked except to feed it, and not often for that, and it should be waked gently and spoken to softly and quietly. Even in the cradle good and evil passions appear, and it is possible to foster the one and restrain the other.

At least twice a day for fifteen or twenty minutes the baby should be laid upon a wide bed covered with a blanket, in a warm room, with all its clothing removed except the stockings, flannel band, shirt, and diaper, and allowed to exercise its limbs and amuse itself.

In summer, a healthy baby may go out when it is a week old; in spring and autumn, when about four weeks old; in winter, when about three months old, if the day is pleasant and sunny, without wind. The best time is between eleven A.M. and two P.M. A young baby should not go out when the wind is sharp, or the ground covered with melting snow, or when the thermometer is below 20° F. An airing may be taken in the nursery, the windows being open, and the baby, covered up warmly, in its carriage, being wheeled up and down. When a baby takes an airing, it must be kept warm by warm wraps and a hot-water bottle; the wind must not blow in its face, nor the sun shine directly into its eyes.

The health of a baby is largely dependent upon the sanitary condition of its nursery, where it spends so much of its life. There should, if possible, be a day nursery and a night nursery. The nursery should be sunny, spacious, and well ventilated. No plumbing, no gas-burning, no cooking of food, no drying of diapers, should be allowed here. The temperature should be about 68° F. during the day and 65° F. during the night for the first three months. After three months it may be 60° F. at night, and the windows may be left open, except when it is freezing outside.

The nursery should be thoroughly aired at least twice a day, the baby being taken to another room meanwhile.

A baby's nursery should be the last place where

"The goodly light and air
Are banned and barred—forbidden fare."

"THE one thing which we seek with insatiable desire is to forget ourselves, to be surprised out of our propriety, to lose our sempiternal memory, and to do something without knowing how or why,—in short, to draw a new circle. Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm."—EMERSON.